

NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-6273
EDWARD CONLEY/TOKYO

NOVEMBER 22, 1978

JAPAN'S RULING PARTY ELECTION CAMPAIGN

ANNCR:

JAPAN'S RULING LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY IS NEARING THE END OF A FIRST-EVER NATIONWIDE ELECTION CAMPAIGN TO CHOOSE ITS PRESIDENT, A JOB THAT ALSO BRINGS WITH IT THE ROLE OF PRIME MINISTER OF JAPAN. VOA'S EDWARD CONLEY HAS THIS BACKGROUND FROM TOKYO.

VOICE:

THE RULING LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF JAPAN CHOOSES A PARTY PRESIDENT -- AND AS A RESULT -- A JAPANESE PRIME MINISTER EVERY TWO YEARS. BUT THIS YEAR'S FORMAT IS DIFFERENT FROM PREVIOUS ONES, SUCH AS THE NAMING OF PRESENT PARTY LEADER AND PRIME MINISTER, TAKEO FUKUDA, TO THE POST IN NINETEEN SEVENTY SIX AFTER BEHIND THE -- SCENES BARGAINING BY HEADS OF THE PARTY'S VARIOUS FACTIONS. AT THAT TIME THERE WAS NO POPULAR VOTING AMONG PARTY MEMBERS AND THE DECISION WAS MADE SOLELY IN TOKYO. BUT NOW, UNDER NEW PARTY RULES, THE RULING LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY FAITHFUL DO HAVE A SAY ABOUT WHO THEY WANT TO HEAD THEIR PARTY AND THE COUNTRY.

DURING THE FIRST THREE WEEKS OF NOVEMBER, FOUR CANDIDATES FOR THE POSITION TOURED THE COUNTRY TRYING TO DRUM UP SUPPORT FROM THE ONE AND A HALF MILLION MEMBERS OF THE L.D.P. THEY ARE PRIME MINISTER FUKUDA, SEEKING ANOTHER TERM; MASAYOSHI OHIRA A LONG-TIME JAPANESE POLITICIAN WHO HAS HELD SUCH POSTS AS FOREIGN MINISTER AND FINANCE MINISTER; YASUHIRO NAKASONE CHAIRMAN OF THE L.D.P. EXECUTIVE COUNCIL; AND JAPAN'S INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND INDUSTRY MINISTER TOSHIO KOMOTO.

SINCE ALL ARE MEMBERS OF THE SAME PARTY AND ALL WANT TO MAINTAIN STABILITY WITHIN THE PARTY THEIR CAMPAIGNING HAS BEEN LOW KEYED. THERE HAVE BEEN NO PERSONAL SLURS AND ONLY SLIGHT VARIATIONS IN HOW THE PARTY'S AND THE NATION'S BUSINESS SHOULD BE CARRIED OUT. IN EFFECT, IT'S BEEN A POPULARITY CONTEST. THE RESULTS OF THAT CONTEST WILL BE KNOWN NOVEMBER TWENTY SEVENTH WHEN MAILED BALLOTS FROM PARTY MEMBERS HAVE BEEN COUNTED.

BUT THAT'S ONLY THE FIRST STEP IN THE L.D.P. PRESIDENCY RACE. THE TWO TOP VOTE-GETTERS IN THE POPULAR BALLOTING WILL THEN, ACCORDING TO PARTY RULES, BE THE FINAL CONTENDERS FOR THE PRESIDENT'S POST. THE WINNER WILL BE CHOSEN IN AN ELECTION TO BE HELD DECEMBER FIRST BY THE THREE-HUNDRED-SEVENTY-EIGHT L.D.P. PARTY MEMBERS OF THE JAPANESE DIET. MOST POLLS TAKEN SO FAR INDICATE THAT PRIME MINISTER FUKUDA AND MISTER OHIRA WILL FINISH ONE-TWO IN THE POPULAR VOTE AND WILL BE PITTED AGAINST EACH OTHER IN THE DECEMBER FIRST CONTEST.

THE SERIOUS BUSINESS OF LINING UP VOTES FOR THAT ELECTION IS ALREADY UNDERWAY. WHILE MISTER FUKUDA'S FACTION IS THE LARGEST IN THE L.D.P., HE STILL WOULD NEED TO SECURE VOTES FROM OTHER FACTIONS TO ASSURE HIMSELF A VICTORY. PRIME MINISTER FUKUDA, ALMOST CERTAIN TO GAIN THE NUMBER ONE POSITION IN POPULAR BALLOTS, IS NOW TRYING TO CONVINCE HIS L.D.P. COLLEAGUES THAT IF THE MARGIN OF VICTORY OF THE NUMBER ONE CANDIDATE OVER THE SECOND CHOICE IN THE NATIONWIDE PARTY BALLOTING IS WIDE ENOUGH THERE SHOULD BE NO NEED FOR A DECEMBER FIRST SHOWDOWN, AND THAT THE RESULT OF THE POPULAR PARTY VOTE BE ACCEPTED BY CONSENSUS.

BUT AT PRESENT IT APPEARS THAT THOSE BACKING MISTER OHIRA AS A LONG-SHOT WINNER, OR THOSE WANTING TO CAST A VOTE, EVEN A LOSING VOTE AS A CHIP FOR POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS WHEN THE SEVENTY-

THREE-YEAR-OLD MISTER FUKUDA DOES STEP DOWN WILL FORCE THE DECEMBER FIRST SIMPLE MAJORITY ELECTION. IF PRIME MINISTER FUKUDA SHOULD LOSE THAT ELECTION HE WOULD LOSE HIS PARTY PRESIDENCY BUT RETAIN THE TITLE OF PRIME MINISTER. BUT IT WOULD ONLY BE A SHORT TIME BEFORE HE RELINQUISHED THAT TITLE AS JAPAN'S POLITICAL LEADER AND PASSED IT ON TO THE NEW PRESIDENT OF THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY.

-0-

WJL/RD